DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 146 CG 011 186

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TITLE Social Skills Training in Correctional Treatment: An Educational Perspective.
PUB DATE 6 Sep 76
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Associatio (84th, Washington, D.C., September 3-7, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Correctional Education; *Correctional Rehabilitation; Human Development; *Institutionalized Persons; *Intervention; *Prisoners; *Skill Development; *Social Adjustment

ABSTRACT

The authors describe the utilization of psychological methods in training or retraining of prison guards/staff who engaged in an action project with prisoners. Social skills training, behavioral training and effective living approaches are described as they may be integrated into training of persons who work with inmates of correctional institutions. Also, a program of psychological study without application is described for college level courses, challenging clinical psychology to develop therapeutic approaches to deal with institutionalized persons within the criminal justice system. The state of the art is reviewed with specific recommendations for practical approaches to rehabilitation and coping more effectively with problems of inmates. (SBP)

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SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING IN CORRECTIONAL TREATMENT: AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Paper presented at the 84th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D. C., September 6, 1976.

CG011186

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Undergraduate education in psychology and the Criminal Justice System is being increasingly sought by diverse groups of students. Social Science majors are interested in more comprehensive and accurate knowledge about the Criminal Justice System and the application of psychology and other social science disciplines to its perennial problems. Correctional officers, partially as a result of the emerging emphasis on their professional status and conduct, are seeking academic training that is practical for their day-to-day job responsibilities. Paraprofessionals being recruited into the Criminal Justice System because of the manpower shortage are eager to learn therapeutic approaches which will aid offenders in their successful reintegration (or even integration) into the community. Paraprofessionals who are working in other clinical settings also are looking for ways they can deal with clients whose behavior results in their entanglement with law enforcement agencies. Finally, criminal offenders, to perhaps a surprising degree, are interested in college level course work as they wish to become better informed about the Criminal Justice System: how it impacts on them and how they can effect constructive change within the Criminal Justice System itself.

Despite this upswing in interest, the contribution of psychology to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Criminal Justice System is being questioned as never before. The controversy which has existed for years in clinical psychology about the effectiveness of different therapeutic approaches with various clinical populations has become especially intense with regard to the efficacy of correctional treatment. Some critics have raised philosophic and ethical questions concerning coercive elements of treatment in correctional settings which themselves are punitive and likely to subvert any therapeutic gains which might possibly be attained. Other critics have cogently argued that criminal behavior has been inappropriately construed as the

manifestation of psychopathology and have asserted that the consequent application of the medical model to rehabilitating offenders has been hopelessly misguided and therapeutically bankrupt. Finally, as evaluative efforts of correctional treatment have become more sophisticated, empirical substantiation of the efficacy of correctional treatment has been forthcoming at a modest, uneven, and halting rate.

Psychologists who with a mixture of trepidation and courage venture into correctional terrain will do well to adopt a perspective on correctional treatment which avoids the pitfalls of the past. While repudiating the medical model of prescriptive treatment and the tendency to automatically psychopathologize offenders' behavior, the perspective must be grounded on empirical investigation and must respect offenders' dignity and self-determination. An emerging approach to clinical intervention, known variously as social skills training, behavioral training, and training in effective living, fits these criteria, and has consequently provided guidelines and perspectives about correctional treatment which have been well received by heterogenous groups of students taking undergraduate courses which have as one emphasis the utilization of psychology within the Criminal Justice System.

Training in effective living is essentially an educational approach that systematically trains individuals to become more interpersonally competent. Rather than construing deviant behavior as intrapsychically determined psychopathological behavior, this perspective analyzes problematic situations which persons encounter in order to identify what alternative behaviors are most likely to have positive long-term payoffs to the individual. Through the use of modeling, behavioral rehearsal, and role-playing, the individual is taught more effective ways to deal with problematic situations which previously

elicited ineffectual and ultimately self-defeating responses by the person. Consequently, behavioral training searches for specific interpersonal dilemmas which particular client populations are likely to encounter and through collaboration between therapist and client trains the individual to behave in a more socially adaptive manner.

An illustration of behavioral training with problem drinking offenders may serve to clarify this approach to clinical intervention. Previous research has revealed that problem drinkers are most likely to relapse when they encounter two kinds of high risk situations: situations where individuals become frustrated and angry and have a self-perception of being unable to express their feelings, and situations where there is social pressure to drink. Rather than focusing on some type of intrapsychic disease process exhibited by problem drinking offenders, a program which systematically trains individuals in learning more adaptive ways of dealing with representative variations of these situations both increases the social competence of problem drinking offenders and significantly enhances their self-confidence when facing these situations in daily living.

Before describing specific instances of the application of behavioral training to undergraduate education, the practical application of behavioral training within the Criminal Justice System should be noted. First, it asserts that criminal offenders have unrecognized and untapped resources for behaving more adaptively when they encounter specific problems in living, which is a more optimistic view of this supposedly recalcitrant correctional population than is held by some traditional therapeutic approaches. As a result, the behavioral training perspective provides significant therapeutic leverage in helping correctional clients deal with many problematic situations that they

encounter either in correctional institutions or in the community. From our clinical experience with behavioral training, we have found that the common notion that the individual offender is totally helpless and without recourse in dealing with oppressive correctional systems or with authoritarian staff members can be successfully countered by systematic and straight-forward efforts whereby correctional clients act in an appropriately assertive manner when confronting these problems in living.

Second, many of the characteristics of traditional correctional systems influence security officers and probation and parole agents to behave towards offenders in an authoritarian manner that interferes with the offenders' effective, mature and responsible behavior. Consequently, criminal offenders frequently behave in passive-aggressive, passive, or aggressive ways toward policies and regulations put into effect by correctional staff. The orientation of the behavioral training provides the opportunity and direct encouragement for reciprocal and interpersonally mutually satisfying relationships between offenders and correctional staff members as it conjointly trains offenders in relating in a more effective manner and trains correctional staff to positively support such behavior exhibited by offenders. Obviously, relationships that are more equalitarian and interpersonally satisfying can generalize to other situations in the community where offenders are likely to benefit through socially competent behavior.

Third, behavioral training provides an educational orientation to correctional treatment which demystifies clinical intervention and which encourages the development of specialized curricula in practical, systematic training that are individualized to focus on high risk situations unique to any criminal offender. While such curricula are only in the training and development stage

presently, they potentially offer significant benefit in providing specific clinical intervention to volunteering persons who desire to learn more appropriate skills in dealing with many problematic experiences which they have.

The social skills training perspective in aiding correctional clients in living more effectively has been implemented with three different groups of students: undergraduate Social Science majors, correctional officers, and criminal offenders who are receiving paraprofessional training.

In the undergraduate course attended by Social Science majors, a detailed rationale of behavioral training is presented. As well, behavioral training is compared with and contrasted to behavior modification, humanistic therapy, and traditional therapeutic approaches. While behavioral training is similar to behavior modification in its emphasis upon functional, adaptive behavior, behavioral training is quite different from many forms of behavior modification in that behavioral training is basically an educational approach that trains the individual in a collaborative manner to behave more adaptively and consequently be rewarded in the natural environment for functioning more effectively. This emphasis is in contrast to behavior modification approaches which provide contingent reward for behavior that corresponds to behavior modifiers' notion of desirable functioning. Obviously, the difference between the newly learned responses which are encouraged by the behavior modifier and responses which are rewarded in the natural environment detracts from any generalization of therapeutic effects away from the artificial learning situation. While behavioral training is similar to humanistic therapy and traditional psychotherapy to the extent that these approaches promote the responsibility and autonomy of clients, its educational, empirical, and systematic training format are not typically encountered in the latter

therapeutic modalities.

The relevance of behavioral training in the Criminal Justice System outlined above is discussed in detail with the students. From a broader perspective, the relevance of current criminological knowledge to behavioral training, especially in regard to the interrelationship between socially ineffective behavior and criminal activity, is also presented. As well, the relationship to social competence to nonrecidivistic behaviors which enhance criminal offenders' community adaptability is discussed at length. Students are also presented with information about the utilization of behavioral training in dealing with a variety of psychological problems that are incidentally experienced by criminal offenders: excessive drinking, psychotic behavior, passive behavior, drug abuse, etc.

The response of students to the perspective on training in effective living has been favorable, both because it provides a coherent, constructive overview for interacting with criminal offenders and because it offers an optimistic approach for working collaboratively with offenders which is often missing from other therapeutic approaches. While students are obviously given no training in applying this perspective directly with correctional clients, their exposure to behavioral training has frequently influenced them to learn more about this perspective of psychotherapy and its application to criminal offenders.

A second course has been offered to correctional officers interested in learning interview and crisis intervention skills which they could apply with selected incarcerated offenders. The two emphases in training were intensive experience in interviewing skills (for screening, establishing rapport, and initiating helping relationships) and specific training in learning how to

encourage effective, responsible behavior by offenders.

The correctional officers were taught that the traditional emphasis on encouraging residents to behave in a compliant and passive manner is likely to be counter-productive to the residents' subsequent adaptive functioning upon return to the community. The officers were then trained in attending to passive and/or aggressive responses which tended to decrease the residents' self-confidence, self-determination, and autonomy, and were subsequently trained through behavioral rehearsal to specifically elicit assertive responses from the residents and encourage the residents to behave assertively both with them and with other staff members. Considerable effort was also involved in instructing the officers on ways that they could behave in appropriately assertive and interpersonally effective manners with correctional clients and fellow officers and staff. Recognition that these types of situations were problematic to residents and to correctional officers came from the officers' own reports, where they indicated that they frequently tended to ignore harrassment and verbal abuse from residents until they finally became angry and upset enough to behave towards the resident in a very aggressive manner. This type of passive orientation that suddenly flipflops into an aggressive response is common with correctional clients, and obviously is perpetuated by similar responses by correctional officers. Finally, correctional officers were taught that in many potentially explosive situations (i.e., resisting orders and threatening to physically harm officers), the easiest way of handling the situation is by a show of force, but this is less effective than through careful communication which respected the offenders' dignity, indicated realistic limits of acceptable behavior, and attempted to mutually de-fuse the situation.

To an impressive degree, correctional officers learned to behave more assertively with correctional clients and brought into the learning situation numerous examples where criminal offenders behaved in a more assertive, self-autonomous manner toward them. Parenthetically, some officers who were perceived by the instructors as being the most psychologically rigid and punitive in their orientation nevertheless accepted the premises of, and demonstrated fairly significant learning in, the social skills orientation.

The third situation for presenting training in effective interpersonal living occurred in a small group setting with criminal offenders who were college students who had volunteered for and had been carefully screened to become paraprofessionals under the supervision of the Clinical Services Unit located in a maximum security correctional setting. The same theoretical orientation given to the undergraduate social science majors was presented to the correctional residents, but in addition they received significant and more practical applications regarding the variety of problematic situations encountered by offenders, behavioral deficits exhibited by offenders, and the kinds of behavioral training which are most likely to develop behavioral competence with offenders. Training and the subsequent application of the skills these students learned had two emphases. First, upon entrance into the maximum security institution, a number of residents experienced significant psychological distress from verbal harrassment by security officers and other residents, from homosexual pressure by other residents, and from psychological and/or physical intimidation by other residents. Receiving psychological support from a paraprofessional, fellow resident who collaboratively worked with the incoming resident to gain the verbal and social skills necessary to withstand such pressures has proven very helpful for a number of correctional

clients, and has been a significant aid to over-taxed professional resources. The other focus is on pre-release training of offenders. Learning is directed toward presenting oneself appropriately in applying for jobs, appropriate skills for maintaining employment, methods for behaving appropriately when meeting with the Parole Board, and practicing skills for successful interpersonal living in the community.

The report of correctional clients to the services offered by the para-professional residents has been quite positive. While the program has been entirely voluntary, some residents have in fact been more comfortable working with a collaborative peer than in talking to a staff member having a professional degree.

Work is going forward in the Bureau of Clinical Services of the Wisconsin Division of Corrections to investigate training programs designed to enhance adaptive social behavior by criminal offenders. Much research is necessary in order to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the behavioral training perspective, but its conceptualization for providing clinical services to correctional clients has shown significant merit to those of us planning correctional treatment as well as teaching undergraduates about psychology in the Criminal Justice System. Our experiences suggest that clinical intervention which focuses on training in effective living provides a heuristic perspective that integrates current knowledge about the Criminal Justice System and incorporates the most promising directions currently in psychotherapy and clinical psychology. More importantly, it offers a hopeful approach for reformers who see the necessity of humanizing the Criminal Justice System, while it simultaneously offers correctional clients specific means for living more effectively and adaptively now and in the future.